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HUMAN NATURE AND ANARCHISM

By JANET GROVE.

The conception of a society "where Love is Liberty and Nature, Law," where voluntary agreement and mutual interest will suffice to maintain an order and harmony in human relations, which centuries of government have left us as far or further from than ever,—this is Anarchist-Communism; Anarchy (Greek for no government), the abolition of man's power to enforce his will on his fellow-man; Communism, the substitution of *Common ownership* of natural resources, of the means of production and of the product of work shared in common, for that *private property* in these things which is the foundation-stone of the said power.

Is this merely an ideal, the realisation of which must at best be postponed to some very dim and distant future when man shall have attained to a superhuman perfection and acquired virtues at present foreign to his nature, or are there even now, commonly operative in human nature as it is today, tendencies which, given free play, would find their fullest and most natural expression and the conditions most favourable to their development, in realising the ideal?

Instead of it being a case of having to wait for our Anarchist social system till human nature has so far improved as to be fit for it, we contend that the potential fitness is there already and can only realise and fulfil itself in proportion as it strives to rebuild society on a basis of free communism. I shall deal with that side of the question later; first of all I will turn the tables on our "human nature is not good enough" opponents by asking whether it is not those very failings which may be, if you like, inherent in man's nature, which unfit him, not to live in an anarchist society which would give no provocation nor power to the most anti-social type to be worse than a disagreeable fellow to mix with, but rather unfit him to live under a form of society like the present where the concentration in a few hands of the means of production places the majori-

ty at the mercy of another's will.

William Morris was of this opinion when he said "No man was ever yet born good enough to be the master of another man." A man's private weaknesses do not affect us except as they may make him less, or sometimes (since we ourselves are also human) even more likeable to us as an individual; only when his monopoly of what we cannot live without gives him power to bend us to his own ends and to our disadvantage, to determine not according to our needs, but to his greed, our share of what makes life worth living, can his imperfections become a public danger.

This opportunity to exploit others, a form of society based on monopoly backed up by constituted authority affords to any one who can seize it by violence, superior cunning and more highly organised and systematic self-interest and can keep it thanks to the cowardice and ignorance of the herd; and instead of the mixture of more and less selfish impulses he generally is, man would need to be perfect indeed to be trusted to forego using such a weapon against his fellows.

In such a society we have no lack of that "sight of means to do ill deeds" which as Shakespeare says, so oft "makes ill deeds done"

Human perfection is hard to define and might I suspect, be harder still to live with, but from the point of view of man as a social animal the only imperfections that really matter to him are anti-social behaviour such as robbery and violence and living at other's expense. And those who preach the necessity of government on the pretext of the need for defending society against man's tendency to these, are just those who are most determined to perpetuate a system which fosters and gives to man's anti-social qualities most scope and power for evil; setting a premium on them on the one hand by rewarding and honouring most highly him who can grab the most for himself, or the most successful in the art of mass-murder known as war, always embarked on, as close analysis will show, in the interests of the profiteer and exploiter; while on the other hand this system forces on the larger part of mankind as their only hope of survival, a hand to hand struggle with their fellows for the means to exist, in which they must cultivate self-interest before all else and repress their more generous tendencies if they would not risk going to the wall.

This has bred such a contagion of habitual conflict between man and man, that it is no wonder though the gen-

erally, in spite of innumerable facts brought to light by sociological research and in every day experience, have come to be unable to imagine other social conditions under which men could exist together save as exploiter and exploited with narrow self-interest the ruling motive and most reliable means of self-preservation; till the cruelty of the strong who fear the weak, will stick at nothing, hypocrisy nor open wrong to keep down those they have wronged, and the envy of these dreams of no happier ideal than from oppressed to become oppressors in their turn.

Normal man, even the most selfish, does not hate nor go out of his way to injure his fellows without any cause, but how can one be surprised if he should hate those who either exploit him, or, as suits their profit best, leave him to starve or eke out on a dole that is given neither as ungrudging charity nor undisputed human right, a pinched and purposeless existence devoid of all opportunity of natural enjoyment. If he feels himself helpless to do aught else, hate he will, till so many have so far forgotten or never had a chance to know what love is and the loveliness of life, that it becomes a second nature to them to take their pleasure, if one can call it such, in futile malice and spite even towards those who have given them no just cause, and to injure by back biting and petty slander as a nasty-tempered cur will snarl when it has no teeth to bite with.

Thus a social system that is the antithesis of anarchistic, itself increases and puts weapons into the hands of those anti-social elements in man's nature that it claims to be the only form capable of keeping in check, and its mechanism, (police and punishment), for dealing with such kinds of anti-social behaviour as are not countenanced by its laws, further involves a whole train of actions degrading to humanity and not least corrupting to those who are paid to carry them out.

Anarchist communism would substitute free agreement among social equals with free access to the means of production for the coercion by the "haves" of the "have nots."

Private ownership of the land and its natural resources being abolished and the question no longer being one of limiting production to what can be sold to the profit of a minority but of producing as much as is needed for the use of all, the organising ability of the people would no longer be allowed to die of disuse nor prostituted to the service of the profiteer, but utilised and developed to the full in devising means to obtain the

maximum return for the minimum expenditure of painful effort.

Since this would result in such plenty that each might take freely from the common store according to the measure of his individual needs and desires, stealing would become a thing of the past for there would be nothing to gain by it, and at the same time all the crimes of violence that frequently accompany man's attempts to gain possession of what he cannot acquire by other means and those that result from tempers exasperated by thwarted cravings for happiness and by ceaseless anxiety as to the means of existence, would disappear.

Released from the necessity of competing with each other for the means to live, men's instincts for mutual aid would have room to grow freely till the doing of an injury to one's fellow man would become as painful and unnatural as it would be objectless.

All crimes, in fact, springing from those evil counter parts, Want and Greed, and that is to say by far the greater number, crimes which all our laws and police have proved incapable of abolishing or warding against, would cease, for no one would be in want and no man is greedy when satisfied to the full.

There remains that bug-bear, the lazy man, to deal with. Men are so accustomed to the sight of people living in idleness on the backs of others, and so aware of the envy with which that position is regarded by many condemned to a life of excessive and monotonous toil under unnecessarily dangerous and disagreeable conditions and often unsuited to their powers and faculties that, regarding only the effects and not the cause, they are apt to consider laziness a far more common human failing than it really is, which is my excuse for giving the subject more space than it perhaps deserves.

We are asked, "What would you do about the lazy man, when men were no longer forced to work?" Not forced to work? Only when food, clothing, houses etc; make themselves will men no longer be compelled to work just as they are now, by their material needs. The only difference under Anarchism is that they would no longer be forced to work for idlers armed with power to take the lion's share of their produce and leave them a bare existence in reward for their toil.

"For that which the worker winneth
Shall then be his indeed
Nor shall half be reaped for nothing
By him that sowed no seed."

The normal individual has a fund of energy which makes inactivity obnoxious to him; deny him scope or definite object on which to expend that energy and he rots and falls into a despairing lethargy as so many are doing on the dole today; even those who are not driven by the need to work for their living have to find some outlet for their energies in strenuous amusements, so-called social services, or occupations more directly harmful to society, or fall a prey to physical and nervous disorders.

It must be remembered that whilst under a system of unequal rights a social stigma attaches to all but the more intellectual forms of work, under a system of equal rights a moral stigma would be attached to all who refused, if called on and able, to share fairly in the harder or less pleasant and interesting work necessary to the maintenance of life. Under Anarchist communism, if a man refused to take his share in necessary work under pleasant conditions, work neither prolonged to exhaustion, monotony nor the exclusion of all but infinitesimal leisure, and involving no social inferiority, reason with him we might but no one could or would force him to work. He would obviously have no title to share in the fruits of work he had taken no part in and as he would no longer, as at present, have any organised force at his disposal wherewith to seize against their will the results of other men's labour, the only person who would suffer would be himself. No one would dispute his right to as much air as his lungs would hold, and if he chose to live on grass like Nebuchadnezzar no one would interfere with his liberty to do so. Most probably, since the really lazy are in the minority even now and would be still fewer under a society where work was agreeable and honoured, and the causes conducive to the disease of laziness had disappeared, and since by well organised production there would be enough of everything for all, and since men who are not hag-ridden by the fear of going short themselves can afford to be generous, we should pity this hypothetical Loch Ness monster of laziness as an unfortunate freak and allow him from our store that which he had not earned by his own exertions, until he got tired of being a mere object of contemptuous tolerance "and the churl shall be ashamed, and shall hide his churlishness till it be gone, and he be no more a churl; and fellowship shall be established on earth."

We anarchists base our ideal not on dreams but on reasoning founded on the facts of human nature. No

man of circumstances, if he could be persuaded of its feasibility, but would recognise that a society in which all worked according to their capacity for the plentiful satisfaction of needs felt by all alike, and no man's gain meant another's loss; in which, that is, individual interests and altruism went hand in hand, would offer him a greater certainty of personal happiness than a society divided into hostile camps, want and toil contrasted with luxury and ease, the under-dog battling desperately to reverse the position, and the top-dog ruthlessly to maintain it, whilst between them stand nature and science offering their gifts to both alike if they would but join hands to use them to create plenty for all, instead of wasting half and fighting for the scraps that remain.

The facts that man is not incapable of common sense and that the instinct of mutual aid, far from being foreign to his nature is so strong in him that even a social system tending for centuries in an opposite direction has failed to kill it, even those most corrupted by self-seeking still rendering at least lip-homage to the brotherhood of man; these are the facts on which we rely for the establishment and success of anarchy, and for our belief in that it only needs to be more widely understood to gain sufficient adherents to put it into practice.

Possibly a negligible minority would remain at its outset so incurably corrupted by the habits and false ideals of the old system that they could not adjust themselves to the new.

Others once it commenced to be consolidated would more or less quickly take the line of least resistance; they are "bad" now because under the existing system it seems to them the easier way to the gratification of their appetites.

But more people than we suspect, and these not only men known to fame and honour for their disinterested idealism and intellectual and moral endowments lifting them above the average level of humanity, but humble ordinary individuals, could step right into it with no alteration in their habitual mode of feeling, save increased happiness in the untrammelled opportunity to bring their instinct for human solidarity into play.

For to live under Anarchism makes no demands on a superhuman perfection man does not possess. Mutual aid would be the keystone of its success and that to act in accordance with this motive has been recognised by man as to act in accordance with his nature, his speech

bears witness.

We know what we mean by a "kindly" man, we love him and we feel happiest when we feel most kindly ourselves. Chambers Etymological Dictionary gives—*Kindly*—(orig) belonging to the race or kind: *natural*: benevolent.

Humane—having the feelings proper to man.

Neighbourly, i. e. neighbour—like conduct is understood to mean mutual helpfulness among neighbours those who dwell nigh to us. If on the other hand we regarded ill will and mutual injury as more natural among such we should call that neighbourly instead. And that word "neighbour" covers a wider circle than it used, for who is not our neighbour since science enables us to communicate in a few seconds with the opposite ends of the earth?

In fact, as Kropotkin has shown with a wealth of instances in his book, thus entitled, *Mutual Aid* was a fundamental instinct not only in man but in all sociable animals, developing naturally out of the primitive instinct of self-preservation because the logic of experience taught that the basic aim of all living creatures could more surely and effectually be attained by uniting each for all and all for each for common interests than by the isolated endeavour of each for himself and the devil take the hindmost—for who could ever be sure under such circumstances that might not one day be himself?

If countless every day instances could not be brought to prove it had survived in spite of all the factors in modern life contending against it and we were forced to conclude that the instinct for Mutual Aid had really become so weak it could no longer be depended on, given a fair chance, as a motive force for just and peaceable dealings between man and man; if it could be demonstrated that the average man would prefer, with nothing but his own bad nature to account for the choice, to live in enmity rather than fellowship with others; if in addition, men will no longer work if they can help it because they find a fuller satisfaction in idleness than in work, or will no longer do good work because they get a joy out of the doing of shoddy work; if these things were true it would be fruitless to deceive ourselves as to the future.

It would mean that whatever might be the case with scientific discovery or the invention of means of satisfying material needs, the evolution of human nature itself was on the down-grade, and modern man on a lower plane as regards the social instincts than the

savages, barbarians, mediaeval man and even than the animals from whom as Kropotkin demonstrated, men inherited those instincts.

If so, we might as well face the fact that since only out of social beings can you build a living and not purely nominal society, no method that can be invented, State Socialism, Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Fascism, Anarchism, no dictatorship nor "ism" whatever, can help us out. Let us eat, drink and be merry, if we can find the means and our stomachs are strong enough for it in the face of human misery—for tomorrow human society dies.

But no; we have have no cause for despair. Since we see that in spite of every obstacle placed in its way in a society based on competition and inequality, mutual aid still remains a living social principal, we are justified in the belief that man needs no fresh virtues but only to cultivate that which he already has; that his selfish propensities will die a natural death with the destruction of that economic system which necessitates and aggravates them; and that, freed from class dictatorship and governmental misdirection, his instincts would find their true line of evolution in the rebuilding of a society inspired by an understanding of this truth, that "Fellowship is Life, and Lack of Fellowship is Death."

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